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## LESSON LEARNED

### Exercise Conduct: Specifying Actors' Roles to Enhance Performance during Exercises

#### SUMMARY

Exercise planners should clearly define actor roles during pre-exercise actor briefings and provide scripts for actors during exercise play. Inadequately briefed actors can misinform exercise participants and unintentionally alter the exercise scenario.

#### DESCRIPTION

On October 27, 2005, the Midlands region of South Carolina conducted a weapons of mass destruction full-scale exercise as part of South Carolina's Three Year Exercise Plan. According to the scenario, a team of disgruntled employees conducted an assault and took hostages in a fictitious, privately owned nuclear processing facility. The employees subsequently released hazardous materials at a busy intersection by detonating an explosive device on a truck carrying nuclear waste. Exercise planners designed the scenario to evaluate and to improve communications; tactical response skills; and command, control, and coordination of response under the National Response Plan and National Incident Management System. The exercise occurred in Aiken and Barnwell counties and involved 451 individuals representing 47 local agencies, 17 state agencies, 4 federal agencies, and 8 private entities.

Exercise planners recruited volunteers to act in the roles of hostages, witnesses, and the company president. The actors received short briefings the day before and morning of the exercise but were not provided with in-depth background on their specific roles or with scripts of scenario-specific dialogue. As a result, some of the actors were unprepared for player questions during the exercise and responded with incorrect or out-of-context information. For example, actors at the Barnwell County site overstated their injuries and acted in a combative manner, which prevented responders from performing planned treatment and triage operations.

Actors now receive more detailed instructions from the South Carolina Emergency Management Division before exercises to clearly define their roles. The Division also allocates more staff to monitor and to control actor behavior. Exercise planners should clearly communicate actor roles and provide scripts to ensure actors have the tools needed to accurately portray their parts in an exercise.

#### CITATION

Batson, Steven. Manager, Weapons of Mass Destruction Training and Exercises, South Carolina Emergency Management Division. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*. 12 Oct 2006.



South Carolina Statewide Homeland Security Exercise Program. *After Action Report: Midlands Full-Scale Exercise.* 27 Oct 2005.

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